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Chapter 10

Matrixial Creativity and the Wit(h)nessing of Trauma

Reconnecting Mothers and Daughters in Marosia Castaldi's Novel *Dentro le mie mani le tue: Tetralogia di Nightwater*

Adalgisa Giorgio

Introduction: Marosia Castaldi and Bracha L. Ettinger

The *oeuvre* of Italian author Marosia Castaldi (born 1952) presents inner and outer worlds for ever on the verge of collapse. This chapter examines *Dentro le mie mani le tue: Tetralogia di Nightwater* (2007, *Your Hands in Mine: Tetralogy of Nightwater*), a 721-page, four-part narrative inspired by the death of Castaldi's own mother and organized around the repetition of a number of core events, images, and affects related to loss and death, set against a backdrop of natural catastrophes, migrations, violence, and war. The first three parts, 'L'ultima notte di Maria Berganza' (Maria Berganza's Last Night), 'Amelie dentro la pancia' (Amelie Inside the Belly), and 'La bambola di pezza' (The Rag Doll), recount three different stories of mothers and daughters seeking reconnection. They take place around one night in 1972 in Nightwater, a neighbourhood of a possible city at once circumscribed and infinite, its boundary being a bend in the road beyond which is the unknown. Part Four, 'Io dentro Nightwater: La dimenticanza' (Me Inside Nightwater: Forgetting),¹ set between April 2004 and July 2006 in a world closer to our own, is narrated by the author of the three previous stories who engages in an intense dialogue with her reader on the links between narrative and life and the ethics of writing.

Italian representations of mothers and daughters have traditionally scrutinized the mother from the perspective of daughters who yearn for her love and attention (often directed to sons), denigrate her for her lack of value, or feel overpowered by her. These feelings are normally tempered by the daughter's attempts to understand the mother, often after her death, through contextualizing her beliefs and actions (Giorgio 2002). Critical assessments have been informed by the critique of the exclusion of the mother from patriarchal socio-symbolic systems conducted by Anglo-American theorists working within the object-relations tradition and/or by Continental philosophers of difference (see Benedetti 2007). The work of Luce Irigaray, Luisa Muraro, and Adriana Cavarero, aimed at inscribing the maternal into the (masculine) Imaginary and Symbolic, has been fruitfully deployed to bring maternal agency and voice to the fore and to identify alternative forms of mother-daughter communication (the body, clothes, dreams) and symbolic bonds in classic, as well as more recent, mother-daughter narratives (Sambuco 2012; Di Rollo 2013).² Castaldi's mothers and daughters have moved beyond the fusion-versus-rejection paradigm, no longer taking refuge in a lost (imagined) presymbolic mother-child symbiosis or abjecting the M(O)ther to avoid psychosis. They seek instead to re-establish a process of transsubjective becoming, originating in a maternal space, that has been halted by external forces leading to trauma. They are accompanied in this process by an author whose writing is an act of remembering and reconnection. A philosophy-of-difference framework, including Cavarero's, which combines maternal primacy with a relational model of subject formation (Cavarero 1997), would be of limited use with a narrative which not only proceeds from a maternal space that is seen as fundamental to the child's psychic maturation, but also dramatizes trauma, the psychic and social processes underpinning trauma, and the healing power of writing. I draw,

instead, on Bracha L. Ettinger, whose 'Matrixial' theory, in encompassing, as we shall soon see, psychic, social, and aesthetic processes, offers a useful set of analytical tools to tackle this difficult and elusive text: a text whose protagonists move to and fro between motherhood and daughterhood, prosaic and horrific external realities, complex inner and outer worlds, different temporalities and textual levels. Ettinger distinguishes primary existential phantasies of maternal 'not enoughness', abandonment, and devouring from real traumatic events, such as 'abandonment' through death (Ettinger 2010: 9-10). This indicates that conflict, oppression, or indifference are not intrinsic to mother-daughter relations. Her theories are therefore suitable to interpret Castaldi's stories of mothers and daughters crushed under the weight of social and historical traumas and 'saved' by the anguished interventions of their author.³

Searching for a 'meaningful construction' capable of making the Woman-Other-Thing that must be erased in a phallic economy a space of support for the subject (Ettinger 2006: 50), Ettinger postulates the emergence of a space of transsubjectivity, the Matrix, in the last months of pregnancy. The encounter between the not-yet child and not-yet mother in this dynamic 'matrixial borderspace' not only contributes to the formation of human psyche (63-65) but also becomes 'a general dimension, element, or sphere in human subjectivity' (Pollock 2006: 3) that operates throughout life irrespective of gender and maternal experience: subjectivity arises from a series of encounters, rather than violent separations and splittings, taking place in a series of borderspaces between at least two always partial subjects who affect one another and produce change. The 'r' in Ettinger's coining, 'metramorphosis', stresses the interconnections and transmission between the transforming subjects (Ettinger 1992). The matrixial borderspace is neither presymbolic, hence unintelligible and anterior to the Symbolic, nor an alternative to the latter, but a subsymbolic, adjacent to and interwoven with the Symbolic, changing it from within (Ettinger 2006: 63). In stating that 'the Matrix is a prenatal symbolic space' (cited in Pollock 2006: 12), Ettinger juxtaposes two notions that are considered mutually exclusive. This revolutionary repositioning engenders a different model of separation from the mother: the Lacanian 'object o', that is to say the m(O)ther that is produced with the emergence of the subject and is lost (causing lack), becomes the 'link-o', namely the M(o)ther, where the bracketed 'o' is a thread 'in-between the I and the non-I' that leaves unconscious traces (Ettinger 2010: 12). The participation of a '*matrixial stratum of subjectivization*' in an expanded Symbolic (Ettinger 2006: 63) means that sexual difference arises in this psychic layer rather than through the later castration complex and acquisition of language/symbolic competence. Subjectivity-as-encounter frees mothers and daughters from regressive undifferentiation and radical separation, allowing them to coexist as different yet connected.

The Matrixial is also marked by and marks sexual difference with cultural and socio-geographical specificity (Pollock 2006: 11), affecting sociopolitical relations through two processes: one results in personal and collective traumas being passed on to later generations in the prenatal matrixial borderspace (2, 6-7); and the other, arising from an understanding of the 'making of human life' as transformative event-encounters between several becoming, joint-in-separateness subjects (3), leads to respect for the Other and the embracing of diversity:

matrixial borderspace allow[s] us to reconsider our understanding of the major traumas of modernity in counterforce to the phallic conception of difference and its horrendous social forms of intolerance and antagonism: racism, homophobia, misogyny. [...] It opens up a space for and a method to move toward a future that does not involve forgetting because it cannot imagine cutting, splitting, caesura: hence

time is transformed by what appears as an attention to a 'prehistoric' condition of subsymbolic connectivity. (9-10)

Since Ettinger's theory of subjectivity is supported by analytic and artistic practices aimed at making the matrixial visible and repairing trauma, it is relevant to Castaldi's ethico-aesthetic engagement with a maternal that is bound up with the European events and traumas that underpin her characters' lives: the Holocaust, World War II, migrations, and racism. Although *Nightwater* evokes Naples, where Castaldi was born, through a volcano, and Milan, where she moved as an adult, through fog and canals, it transcends both cities, presenting a post-national space rife with splittings and caesuras. While I cannot account for the totality of a vast narrative that fits Franco Moretti's definition of *opera mondo* ('world text', a modern epic) (Choukhadarian 2007: 15), a matrixial lens will make visible links and conjunctions, beneath the seemingly fragmented surface, between the disparate elements within each story and across the four different stories. The analysis that follows uncovers the extent and force of Castaldi's concern with the maternal and illuminates her original contribution to motherhood studies. Her work advances our understanding of the mother no longer as the Other subordinate to the Paternal but as a space of symbolic, ethical, and aesthetic production and of mother-daughter relations no longer as conflict and loss of self but as a foundational space of empowering and life-giving transsubjectivity. It also furthers our appreciation of the far-reaching impact of the social on family bonds. Before I do that, I must first consider the use of repetition as a fundamental strategy in both Ettinger's and Castaldi's art.

Matrixial Refrains

Ettinger contrasts 'representation', which re-presents what is with-out and already there, with 'artistic operation', which presents what originates with-in/in the self and is '*beyond appearance*' (Bertelsen 2004: 124). Adopting a matrixial gaze in art means to blur the boundaries between document and creation (Ettinger 1996: 109), to expand the 'ready made' with elements from the unconscious and fantasy (Pollock 1995: 143), making art an encounter with trauma (Bertelsen 2004: 127). Ettinger's painting approaches 'the "end" of history [the Holocaust] with a perpetual rebeginning [...] Ettinger considers it the goal of her art to "make affect transmissible." Her series are affective carriers of traumatic renewal' (Massumi 2006: 212). These series, which incorporate photographs, photocopies, and maps, repeat the same motifs with imperceptible differences, which allows the affects slowly to emerge from the subsymbolic and be given symbolic expression. Matrixial refrains – Bertelsen's (2004) coining for repetitions that render the matrixial stratum visible through a spatio-temporal play of appearance and disappearance leading to an encounter between subjectivities, recognition of others, and change (see also Rowley 1999) – are thus fundamental to artistic creation, acting as both symptom of and cure for trauma. Art is 'both the illness and the remedy' (Ettinger 1999: 15). Ettinger's serial art draws attention to trans-situationality (Massumi in Bertelsen 2004: 131), making the always situated event '*spatially and temporally mobile*' (Bertelsen 2004: 131) and relevant beyond the personal context. It may, therefore, 'lead us to discover our part of shared responsibility in the events whose source is not "inside" the One-self' (Ettinger 1995: 51). The matrixial gaze thus also activated in the viewers transforms the unwitnessed (unseen) into a non-cognitive knowledge that Ettinger (2006: 142-44) calls 'wit(h)nessing', a shared witnessing that is done with and beside the other who witnessed (Pollock 2010: 831).

If we translate Ettinger's aesthetics to narrative, it becomes apparent that Castaldi's non-realist writing is well suited to make the matrixial visible: her thematic choices are supported by formal and stylistic characteristics with the potential to uncover traces of the

matrixial by activating a gaze that leads to affective event-encounters and wit(h)nessing. Her poetics of the visible and absence/presence (Giorgio 2010), perhaps originating in Castaldi also being a sculptor,⁴ invests objects with affective valence whilst affects and concepts linked to affect are concretized in bodies and things: time is a dog, a ship named Maria Berganza is Maria's life, crabs are Maria's mother's cancer, Amelie's mother's anguish is a clock that ticks furiously in her shoulder, the narrator-author's unrelenting suffering is a painful ball in her belly that she cannot expel.⁵ The proliferation of repetition is another feature of Castaldi's narrative that brings it close to Ettinger's artistic practice. The four stories of *Dentro le mie mani le tue* recount a number of highly charged event-encounters over and over again. Some are story-specific, while others recur throughout. The chapter titles hardly change, repeating place names and dates, pointing at the repetitive narrative structure and the obsessive quality of the narrated and signalling that Castaldi's narrative is, like Ettinger's art, 'a practice of trauma' and 'memory of oblivion' (Massumi 2006: 211-12) that takes place in an alternative temporality.⁶ The entwined hands in the title are a key motif running through the tetralogy till the author's final words in the closing note: 'still now while I write I can see her [my mother's] hands inside mine and [...] also the eternally loved hands of my daughters inside mine' (*Dentro le mie mani*: 721).⁷ Castaldi's drawing on the cover, showing, in contrast, the bust of a headless and handless woman, evokes forcefully the impossibility of subjectivity without connection. This simultaneous absence and presence of corporeal ties alerts us to the centrality of transsubjective connections and wit(h)nessing in the novel. The presence of a metanarrative that embeds and reflects on the narrative and later trespasses upon it to become a full-blown narrative in Part Four, bolsters this expectation.

The tetralogy opens with an unsigned 'Introduction' written during the night between 6 and 7 July 2004 to mark the beginning of work on the final draft of the book we are about to read. The authorial voice, herself part of Nightwater, speaks of the risk of dissolving herself in her characters: 'I stepped into homes the school the hospital and inside the Is of all those I met in the streets so much so that I reached the point of losing myself' (*Dentro le mie mani*: 8). This voice disappears but later intrudes briefly into Part Three and becomes the narrator-protagonist of Part Four, finally coming close to Castaldi in the note dated July 2006 and signed M.C. placed at the end of the novel. The Pirandellian fracture of the subject highlighted in the 'Introduction' – the discovery that s/he is one, a hundred thousand, namely as many as those s/he encounters, and no one – is later repaired thanks to her nocturnal encounters, in Part Four, with a flesh-and-blood reader/other who materializes, by Pirandellian trickery, in her study-bedroom, called forth by psychic necessity.⁸ The book will be brought to completion, as an authorial subject emerges joined in matrixial com-passionate 'severality' with her characters, an Ettingerian co-emergence through the exchange of affects between several partial subjectivities who share a psychic event but are not the same. In the next two sections, I propose a reading of the first three Parts as an artistic operation that makes visible through repetition the matrixial borderspace occupied by personal affects and trauma, and of Part Four as a process of collective symbolization of those affects and metamorphosis, while identifying Castaldi's matrixial ethics/aesthetics.

Parts One, Two, and Three: Restoring the Matrixial Borderspace

These three Parts are about different characters who live in Nightwater and die at about the same time. While no connection between their deaths is suggested, the refrains create a sense of mounting danger and tragedy climaxing, at the end of each Part, in their deaths. Part One, 'L'ultima notte di Maria Berganza', recounts Maria's delirium during her last hours in hospital: her childhood marked by her mother, Rosa Berganza's death in the paternal home

surrounded by olive trees, her departure from home, her arrival in Nightwater, her unsuccessful attempt to give her daughters a new home after her husband leaves her, her falling in love again, her roaming the world on a ship, and her return to Nightwater to die. The chapters alternate between Maria's agony surrounded by her daughters in 1972 and ten-year-old-Maria in 1932 at the deathbed of her own mother, consumed by an illness originating, in young Maria's perception, in her son's death (*Dentro le mie mani*: 67). The protagonist of Part Two, 'Amelie dentro la pancia', is born after seven sons into a migrant family whose life is marked by hard work, poverty, lack of opportunities, conflict, and *desertitudine* (273), an affect of desolate separation from the world (Borgna 2002: 90, orig. 1995): 'An immense loneliness started to spread over the silent tablecloth [...] Each one of them seemed alone to themselves and distant from themselves and everybody else [...] War is better – the mother thought – than this tremendous loneliness' (*Dentro le mie mani*: 274). Born an 'idiot' (perhaps because of her mother's late pregnancy), forty-year-old Amelie crawls, meows, scratches the walls, and eats the plaster, perhaps as a result of traumas: her cat being killed by the local boys, her mother's premature death, and her having been segregated in her mother's bedroom for thirty years. She is used for sex by her brothers who also sell her to other men including the priest who baptized her. The story ends with Amelie's death at the hands of the people of Nightwater, who try to stop her leaving in order not to be deprived of her services and end up killing her. Part Three, 'La bambola di pezza', is the story of a mother and daughter who have become disconnected after witnessing their husband/father being killed by the Germans, but reconnect during their last hours in hospital, after the daughter has been assaulted and raped by the people of Nightwater.

The themes of death and loneliness in death dominate the whole tetralogy. In Part One, the refrain of Christ's agony (as 'struggle') on the Mount of Olives and his insistent prayer to God, 'Remove this cup from me' (*Dentro le mie mani*: 59 and elsewhere),⁹ counterpoints Maria's and Rosa's interleaved agonies. The blood on Christ's face (64, 353) – unique to Luke's Gospel, according to which Christ's anguish was such that he sweated blood – brings into relief the many red objects scattered in the text, which in turn recall the womb, pregnancies, and births: red coral jewellery, red dresses and shoes, Amelie's and the rag doll's red hair, and more. Death is thus tightly interwoven with life and reproduction, as underscored by another image-refrain of a faceless woman dressed in red pushing an empty pram which emits an 'enormous vast breath similar to the wail of a newborn child' (54). This breath of life is linked with the recurring motif of Maria's, her mother's, and her daughters' heartbeats. They are Maria's memories of her own and her mother's heartbeats, connected yet not-one, in the matrixial borderspace:

I confused my breath with the heartbeat which came from my mother's chest, I made superhuman efforts to adapt to that rhythm but her heart was galloping. I too felt a thousand horses furiously galloping inside me. I had gone into my mother's heart and she placed her hand on my chest to calm the fury which she could hear inside me. (41)

In a later intrauterine scene, the child-to-be's wit(h)nessing of the changes in Rosa's heartbeat due to grief for her son's death wards off the possibility of fusion: Maria knows, already in the womb, that 'I had not been the only light illuminating her life' (161), also showing that she has inherited trauma, transgenerationally, in the prenatal borderspace. This connectedness-in-separation is reinforced by the discontinuous yet floodlike, tense yet hypnotic rhythm of Castaldi's repetitive and sparingly punctuated prose.

Other refrain-events linking strife with breakdown in matrixial connectedness characterize Parts Two and Three. Amelie asks: 'Why have you put a mirror inside your

belly?’ (279). This repositioning of the mirror, fundamental to the entry into the Symbolic, inside the maternal space activates a matrixial gaze which enables Amelie to reconnect the image she sees with the body that is regularly violated by men and with her name/Self. Addressing her mother, she says:

Amelie. Is this my name? Does it matter now perhaps I haven’t even been born maybe I haven’t got a name yet maybe I am nothing [...] The room is in the mirror, the man is in the mirror, [...] Maybe that woman in the mirror yes she must have a name. Perhaps Amelie is her name. The men keep saying it Amelie! and they clasp me with violence. (238-39)

Amelie’s scratching the wall is a memory of her prenatal life, pointing at activity and her desire to be born: during the last months, her mother could hear her scratching inside the womb. The mirror brings back this originary matrixial space-time, in which Amelie now talks to her mother and makes her a wit(h)ness to her trauma. In the remaining 100 pages of this Part, we are told about Amelie’s birth, her christening and tenth-birthday parties, to which her mother had invited all the residents of Nightwater. However, her efforts to include them in her mother-daughter matrixial space and create a matrixial social web fail. Her last words before dying are: ‘Enough with wars, I am tired’ (401). Thirty years later, Amelie’s death is brought on by the same ‘war’. On her way to leave Nightwater with her youngest brother, wearing her mother’s red shoes,¹⁰ a mob kills them both. They die together, their hands entwined. Part Three ends on the same motif.

The matrixial encounter-refrain of intertwined hands acts as a cure to traumatic disconnection. Maria’s death with her hands entwined with her daughters’ is an event-encounter of matrixial wit(h)nessing (225-26), which is juxtaposed with the ‘paternal’ counter-refrain of Christ’s lonely agony. God’s refusal to alleviate his suffering – ‘No, I shall not remove it’ (59 and elsewhere) – contrasts with the constant presence of young Maria and Maria’s daughters’ at their mothers’ deathbeds. Paternal separation, the Father’s Law of justice and power (671), is pitted against feminine transgenerational wit(h)nessing, a contrast-comparison suggested by the references to the olive trees surrounding the house in which Rosa is dying and the biblical Mount of Olives. In ‘La bambola di pezza’, intertwined hands keep mother and daughter alive after the daughter has been lynched by the mob tired of the clanking of her wheelchair scurrying around Nightwater. Numerous refrains linked to tragic and violent events, conflating different temporalities and personal and collective traumas, take us to their death. The narrative moves from the young daughter’s fall from a balcony while running after her ball to the mother’s unflagging efforts to recompose her daughter’s shattered body by sewing together body parts that she makes with cloth and chalk (the ‘rag doll’), to the mob’s assault on the ‘rag doll’. Past happy trips to Pompeii by mother and daughter slide into descriptions of the hot ash from Mount Vesuvius killing its inhabitants in AD 79 and a mother trying to save her child from it, the child rape of their maid, the Holocaust, World War II, and Hiroshima.

During their last hours mother and daughter reconnect after the daughter verbalizes the trauma that had interrupted their connection. While they lie with their hands entwined, she recounts her father’s horrific death. The quick and powerful description of a German soldier crushing his head under his boot is followed by the daughter’s jump into the ‘abyss of the balcony’ (474). While her fall had been narrated many times before, its juxtaposition, at this point, with her father’s death suggests a causal link between the two events: she may have jumped intentionally. The last fifty pages intercalate the refrain of the father’s death with the dying daughter’s pressing questioning of her mother. The gaze is fundamental to the

affects that fill these pages. The mother saw her husband's death from the window, and the daughter saw her mother's gaze:

She stopped expecting [anything from life] the day she saw her husband's face turned to mush by the Nazi soldier's enormous shoe [...] You played with me [...] but I could see the fierce flash in your eyes. That kick had placed something dead and cruel in them which wouldn't disappear from your face, mum [...] Did you really think that I'd run towards the balcony because I was happy to play with the ball? [...] I couldn't bear your eyes looking at me as if I weren't a child but a rag doll. (477)

The daughter's yearning for her mother's gaze is contrasted with the mother's thunderstruck face and vacant look, detached from her daughter, their home, and their previous life. The daughter reveals that she jumped from the balcony out of jealousy of her father, guilt for his death, demand for maternal love, fear of her mother's grief, indifference, and hatred (478-79). She asks her mother to let her die by letting go of her hand, demanding stronger proof of her love: 'a mother's love must be boundless for her to let her child die' (515). As the mother loosens her grip, the daughter asks her to hold her hand again, as if to give her mother proof of her own love:

Now you hold my hand and we are together now I suffer too for that man who died so badly. He was my father and your husband we are suffering together the agony in the garden [of Gethsemane]. Hold my hand [...] Keep me company a bit longer so we can die together. (520-21)

Sharing the pain turns their witnessing his death into wit(h)nessing.

Part Four: Art as Remembrance

In this Part the author's subjectivity-in-connectedness emerges in relation to her own mother and daughters, her characters, and her reader. The role of writing is to remedy traumas through reconnecting the subjects involved because 'We were all separate, not just my mother and I' (*Dentro le mie mani*: 591):

Each person is separated from somebody in Nightwater. Berganza is separated from her father from her grandmother from a life that she doesn't recognize as her own, the rag doll's mother is separated from her daughter from the light inside the window in which her husband's smashed face is stamped. Amelie has lived separated in her room for years. (601)

Snippets of Maria's, Amelie's, and the rag doll's stories are interspersed with sections on the death of the author's brother, its impact on her mother, her mother's death from cancer, her own life with her daughters, and her battle with food. The basis of narrative in 'document' (life) and the process of transformation of life into art are dramatized in the text in relation to the fictional author, making the narrative a laboratory where, as in psychoanalytic practice, 'traces of coemerging with-in the (m)Other(nal non-I are reawakened to reabsorb new traces' (Ettinger 2010: 15). The author is at the same time artist, therapist, and patient, who, having wit(h)nessed her characters' traumas, reflects upon them with what Ettinger (2010) would describe as empathy-within-compassion and empathy-within-respecting, empathy for them and compassion and respect for their mothers, transferring this understanding to her own life and inviting readers to do the same.

The death of the rag doll's father returns in Part Four, providing an example of these processes. The author gives the mother's reasons: 'life has inundated her with so much blood that she had to put a barrier between herself and everything that moves, even between herself and her daughter' (*Dentro le mie mani*: 586). There follows an empathetic portrayal of the German soldier stressing his youth and lack of understanding of his own actions, interspersed with the descriptions of other violent acts, such as other young soldiers cruelly sending children to the gas chambers in front of their mothers (637). We are then taken into the dying husband's mind – 'He doesn't understand that I'm dying he is only a kid' (654) – and finally into the soldier's consciousness to wit(h)ness his becoming aware of the atrocities he has committed and his suicide.

Like Ettinger's maternal I, our author operates simultaneously on two levels: from the perspective of a matrixial subjectivity, she meets the non-I of the vulnerable characters and establishes borderlinking, and from a post-Oedipal position, she establishes boundaries (Ettinger 2010: 15). She insists that she cannot tell whether Amelie withdrew to the bedroom of her own accord or her brothers locked her up: 'No, I'm not her. I'm not any of you all. You have your own life when you are alive and after you die' (*Dentro le mie mani*: 648). As a mother/writer,

I've become so many people and things, but I have always felt that they were other from me [...] that everybody inside Nightwater had their own life which was intertwined with mine. I was always in the middle, on the edge of a threshold between that which is I and that which is not I. (709)

For her writing to save her characters from oblivion, boundaries as well as connections are required: with the characters, her own life, and her reader. The latter tells her: 'You're not alone remember that' (652).

In the last fifty pages she debates her role as witness and creator, drawing a comparison between herself and Primo Levi. Her reader considers the latter a real witness, entitled to write the atrocities he experienced and saw (660). The author argues that what she invents is no less real simply because it cannot be documented by history and that, in the way invoked by Ettinger, she is also a witness (662-65): 'I try to make you see things that you cannot see unless you walk around them with your imagination' (669). She has fulfilled her responsibility in writing a book that 'has stuck in your gullet precisely because it has made you remember things that are no bed of roses' (661). Castaldi's writing, we have seen, goes beyond witnessing, becoming matrixial wit(h)nessing. Thus, despite the reference to forgetting in the title, Part Four is about remembering. 'Forgetting' here invites an Ettingerian reading: the author's stepping into Nightwater is a method of futurity, her book a 'memory of oblivion'.

Conclusion

Dentro le mie mani le tue deals with many aspects of being a woman and a mother, such as housework, mothering and work, single motherhood, absent fathers, daughters' safety, letting go of children, stopping the mother from swallowing up the woman. Yet, these ordinary situations are only accessory to loftier concerns, 'the starting point for scrutinizing all the abysses of the soul and the figurations they engender' (Galimberti 2007). Castaldi zooms in and out of the personal and the social, the local and the cosmic. She privileges women and presents mother-daughter relations that are no longer determined by 'structural traumas' – those posited by psychoanalysis as necessary for subject formation – that doom them to non-existence. They are warped instead by 'historical traumas', such as illness, bereavement,

violence, cataclysms, and war (Pollock 2010: 834, n. 4). Thus, her ‘aesthetic practice’ – her narrative and rhetorical strategies – is not an exercise in regression to the negative place to which phallic thought relegates the feminine/maternal, but one of futurity. Bringing to light the traces of the maternal means attempting to restore the matrixial potential for subject-to-subject interconnection which is necessary for the resolution of trauma. The traumas of Castaldi’s mothers and daughters originate in the traumas of our era, notwithstanding the structural traumas which impact on their response to historical traumas. Consequently, death, which is the motor of *Dentro le mie mani le tue*, is never only a personal or a human/universal experience, but also and always a community event. Castaldi’s work has national and regional resonances, presenting poverty, migration, intolerance of diversity, or the insecurity of life under Vesuvius. She reminds her Italian readers of their past intranational and transoceanic mass emigration, the subalternity of the South within the nation, and their colonial past, to make them face their negative affects *vis-à-vis* today’s immigration. She brings Italian and European historical traumas out of oblivion, forcing us to reflect on our shared moral obligations and encouraging us to take responsibility for change. To this end, she ‘presents’ a maternal space of interconnection and transsubjectivity which characters, author, and readers must return to and draw on to reactivate their potential for the empathetic and com-passionate inter-relationships necessary to bring about personal and collective renewal.

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¹ The page ranges for the four Parts are the following: Part 1: 9-232, Part 2: 233-408, Part 3: 409-523, and Part 4: 525-719.

² In this chapter, 'Symbolic', with a capital letter, refers to Lacan's order of the linguistic, ideological, and social codes that form the 'Law of the Father'; 'symbolic', in lower case, describes either elements of the Lacanian Symbolic (such as symbolic competence) or, more generically, something that is understood in a figurative sense (such as symbolic bonds versus blood bonds).

³ Critical utilization of Ettinger by Italianists is limited to Benchi (2014), who uses her theories, together with (primarily) Irigaray's, to interpret aspects of various narratives rather than for a sustained reading of specific texts.

⁴ She studied art at Brera Academy in Milan after graduating in philosophy in Naples.

⁵ Food and food-related disorders recur in Castaldi's work (notably, *La fame delle donne* (2012, The Hunger of Women) and *La donna che aveva visioni* (2013, The Woman Who Had Visions)).

⁶ 'Memory of oblivion' is Ettinger's own phrase (1993: 11; 2006: 140).

⁷ All translations into English are mine.

⁸ For Pirandellian influences on Castaldi, see Giorgio 2008.

⁹ Castaldi's original, 'Allontana da me questo calice', is in Luke (22: 42) and Mark (14: 36). I cite the English Standard Version.

¹⁰ Amelie's mother stopped wearing red shoes after marrying. Castaldi gives red shoes positive connotations of freedom, perhaps challenging the traditional conceptualization of female sexuality as sinful underlying Hans Christian Andersen's symbolism in the homonymous tale (1845).